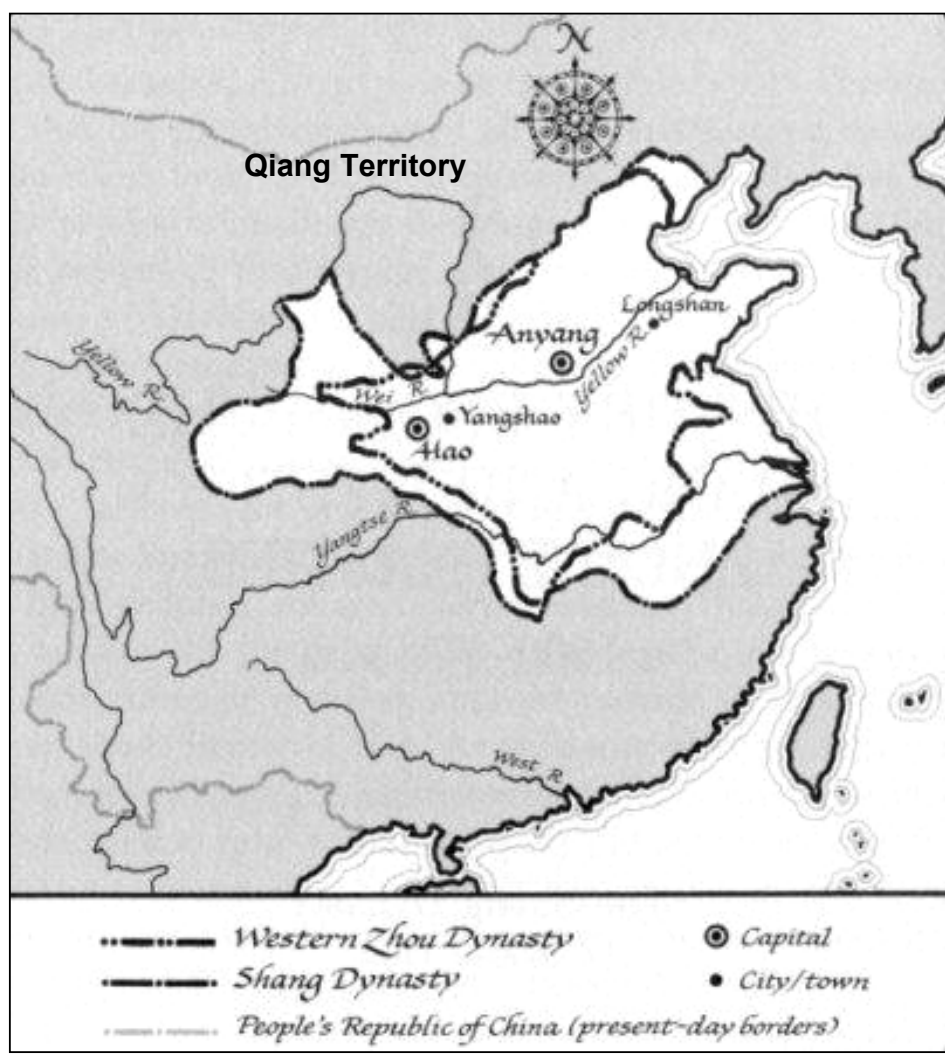


Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.1—Readers' Theater



Map Source: Paul and Bernice Noll's Window on the World
<http://www.paulnoll.com/China/Dynasty/dynasty-West-Zhou.html>

A Short Play
by
Sharon Cohen

Narrator: One of the new Chinese archaeologists assigned to work on interpreting the evidence found in the Shang tombs falls asleep while puzzling over the field reports. He last looked at a ceramic horse, wondering how the Shang negotiated trade deals with their neighbors who were nomadic horse herders.

The Chinese archaeologist imagined a girl riding a horse. Maybe her name was LiLi. She loved to run alongside her horse across the grassy steppe. Her family was under the control of a stronger pastoral nomadic group, the Qiang. LiLi's family herded horses, but they also grew a few crops for food.

LiLi's mother: LiLi, Lili, wake up!

LiLi: Is the battle today?

LiLi's mother: Yes, get up and help get the chariots ready.

LiLi: I need to get my horse first.

Narrator: LiLi got her horse and fitted him to a chariot. She wished she were tall enough to handle the chariot, but her older brother would drive the chariot instead. They were fighting a battle with the powerful Shang army today. During the battle, LiLi's older brother was wounded by an arrow, and, when LiLi ran out to rescue her horse, she was captured by a Shang soldier. He took her and other war captives back to the town of Anyang (see map) to be executed as human sacrifices. These victims were to be placed in a new tomb burial for the Lady Fu Hao, consort of the Shang king.

LiLi: I must escape, but how? Maybe I can run away when they bring the dinner meal.

Guard for prisoners: Here's your food. What! How did she run so fast? Oh well, there's plenty more girls for the sacrifice tomorrow.

LiLi: Now that I have escaped, how will I get back home? I wonder what that group is doing with all of those packages?

Shang Government Official #1 (with a princess of the Shang royal family): Perhaps this Shang

princess can bring a bit of peace to the North China plain.

Shang Government Official #2: Marriage alliances with the Qiang are a good idea. Remember, our fourteenth king was a Qiang, but the current Qiang ruler seems to have a lot of support from the people in his area of the North China plain.

Shang princess: [sobbing]

LiLi [crouching nearby]: Why is she crying? Her clothes are all made of silk. What is she holding in her hand?

Servant for Shang princess: Stop crying, it'll ruin your pretty face. What are you reading?

Shang princess: It's a copy of the questions and answers the ancestors gave my father about sending me to the Qiang court.

Servant for Shang princess: What does it say?

Shang princess: I'm sending my daughter to marry a member of the Qiang court. Does the fourteenth king of Qiang agree? Will the marriage stop the battles between us? The answers to both questions were "yes".

LiLi: I must try to travel with them back home. If they're going to the Qiang court, then they'll pass near my settlement.

Narrator: LiLi managed to join the bridal party. They stopped for a day at the wall-fort (garrison) on the way to the Qiang territory. LiLi briefly stole the Shang princess' bamboo copy of the oracle bone inscription to copy some of the Chinese characters. The next day LiLi was home with her family.

LiLi: The Shang looked and acted a lot like the Qiang. See, look at the bamboo strip: The inscriptions show that they use chariots, horses, and strong bows like us.

LiLi's father: What is this other sign?

LiLi: I think it is a picture of some sort of tool used to help break up the earth for planting crops.

I saw some farmers using them near the garrison. The farmers looked sad. Their crops are taken for the soldiers and new Shang settlers coming from Anyang.

LiLi's father: How do they make this tool?

LiLi: I don't know, but it had two prongs and a crossbar for pressing down with your foot.



**A character from the
Shang dynasty
symbolizing “plow” or
“digging stick.”**

Cecillia Lindqvist, *China:
Empire of the Written Symbol*
(London: Harvill, 1991), 166.

LiLi's father: Oh, it must be made of cast iron. That's heavy. Did they use oxen to pull this tool?

LiLi: I only saw one ox with the tool. The other farmers were lifting and dragging the tool by themselves. They looked strong, and the tool seemed to break up the loess soil very easily.

LiLi's father: Well, maybe in our next trade exchange, we can ask about getting one of the new tools. It would help us plant more next spring.

Narrator: The archaeologist woke up and thought it was funny how his dream used all of the latest interpretations of the elements of early complex society on the North China plain and East Asia. Who knows? Maybe a girl like Lili really did escape human sacrifice and brought back news of the cast iron plow to groups ruled by a rival of the Shang dynasty.